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STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

“FINANCIAL FRIENDLY FIRE: A REVIEW OF PERSISTENT
MILITARY PAY PROBLEMS”

APRIL 27, 2006

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Good afternoon Chairman Davis and members of the committee on government reform, I am Colonel Mark McAlister, Commander of the 18th Soldier Support Group (Airborne), responsible for Personnel, Finance, and Postal support for the XVIII Airborne Corps. It is my privilege to speak to you today about current procedures and useful solutions to the pay processing for Army Guard and Reservists who redeploy due to injury.

The XVIII Airborne Corps units and Special Forces units at Fort Bragg have been deployed since 2001 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the Finance asset for the Corps, units from the 18th Soldier Support Group (Airborne) have been continuously deployed in some capacity from 2002. Fort Bragg, as a Power Projection Platform, has spearheaded the influx of Mobilized Army Guard and Reserve Soldiers in support of the Global War on Terrorism. In conjunction with the reduced manpower and equipment from the continuous deployments and high operational tempo of XVIII Airborne Corps, the garrison support responsibilities of the 18th Soldier Support Group (Airborne) have also increased significantly. Since the beginning of the war the number of mobilizing and demobilizing Soldiers/customers processed at Fort Bragg has increased from 0 to 1,100 Soldiers per month. Through many years of experience and lessons learned, Fort Bragg has developed a system of checks and balances that has eliminated the number of debt collections from wounded in action cases since the summer of 2005.

Today I will discuss the short falls that were found during the previous Government Accountability Office (GAO) Inspection and procedures that have been put in place to rectify the shortfalls. Mobilization and Demobilization of Army Guard and

Reservists was previously performed at Fort Bragg by an activated Reserve Component unit, the 2125th Garrison Support Unit (GSU) from 2001 to August 2004. We agree that there was lost visibility on Soldiers who were assigned to the Medical Retention Processing Unit (MRPU). Because of this loss of accountability of some WIA Soldiers, their deployment entitlements continued, causing the problem that the GAO report correctly identified in June 2005.

In August 2004, Fort Bragg transferred the Mobilization and Demobilization pay support mission to the 18th Soldier Support Group/126th Finance Battalion. During this time, the Battalion Headquarters was deployed in Balad, Iraq supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom II and the Group Headquarters was training for a November 2004 deployment. There was an overlap in Theater where all headquarters and senior commanders were deployed to Southwest Asia performing combat finance and personnel missions for the XVIII Airborne Corps. Upon the return of the 126th Finance Battalion in January 2005, their mission significantly increased at Fort Bragg. They immediately refitted and prepared to assume the garrison mission of finance support that had exponentially increased while they were deployed; they became the 18th Soldier Support Group Rear Provisional Unit, and began preparing more units for deployment. The challenge to perform all of these missions simultaneously was daunting and ultimately led to the loss of accountability.

Following the GAO inspection, we implemented the Wounded in Action Database to track WIA Soldiers returning from Theater to the MRPU. The database integrates information from medical, personnel, and finance systems maintaining the status of WIA Soldiers who depart Southwest Asia for treatment. This synchronization

of systems has alleviated a majority of the problem, however military pay is a sensitive issue and we were not satisfied with just one solution.

In addition to the database, all Army Guard and Reserve Soldiers assigned to the MRPU are now required to in process Finance with a copy of all their orders. The database is updated weekly, and the MRPU Commander verifies Soldiers and their entitlements on a Unit Commander's Finance Report, published and turned in monthly. Weekly correspondence between the MRPU and the 126th Finance Battalion WIA and MOB/DEMOB teams are conducted to discuss potential issues. WIA Soldiers who are unable to in process the MOB/DEMOB section located at the Fort Bragg Soldier Support Center are visited personally by a Finance Soldier to ensure their entitlements are stopped in a timely manner and any other Finance needs or concerns are addressed. Through the Standard Operating Procedures developed at Fort Bragg, a system of checks and balances has been established to prevent the overpayment of WIA Soldiers upon returning from their tour of duty.

I am confident in the results of the procedures put in place at Fort Bragg. We have been inspected twice since the last GAO report. First, by the DFAS Network Audit and Field Compliance Office (NAFCO), who classified current operations in the highest category, "Green-Outstanding." This DFAS Team stated that Fort Bragg is in compliance with the published guidance. Second, in February 2006, the WIA Regional Manager at DFAS came to Fort Bragg to review the MOB/DEMOB, WIA, and MRPU processes. The Regional Manager confirmed that Fort Bragg is in compliance with all published guidance and regulations. This is a significant improvement to the previous

procedures utilized and its success is evident by zero new WIA debt collection cases since the processes were implemented.

Additionally, in February 2006, we coordinated with DFAS to send a Tiger Team to Fort Bragg to provide additional training on Reserve Component pay and WIA systems as well as assistance in researching outstanding cases referenced in the GAO Report.

The current status of the 259 reported cases is as follows:

- 69 cases not WIA (40 had no debt, 29 debts processed through DFAS for collection)

- 31 cases had no debt

- 3 cases were duplicate names

- 37 cases were transferred to DFAS for action at their request (i.e. VIPs)

- 117 cases are at DFAS waiting for remission of debt decision

- 1 remission case was approved

- 1 case is being processed by the National Guard Bureau

There are currently no WIA cases awaiting Fort Bragg action.

The final solution to integrating medical, personnel, and finance systems is not yet in place. However, when the “Defense Integrated Military Human Resource System (DIMHRS)” is fielded, it should provide the integrated capability that the Army is currently lacking.

Our dedication to providing outstanding service to fellow Soldiers is evident in the effort we have made to correct the problem of Army Guard and Reserve WIA pay and our recognition by the American Society of Military Comptrollers as the best Financial

Management Organization below MACOM in the DoD. It is my hope that our lessons learned will be used in the future to ensure that other mission commanders assigned on Power Projection Platforms mobilizing and demobilizing Soldiers, will receive the necessary recourses, training, and systems to establish accurate Reserve Component pay systems and WIA processes from the start.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about actions being taken at the Soldiers' level. Mission First Soldiers Always! Airborne All the Way! I look forward to your questions.